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DE RUEHAA #1255/01 3241416

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 201416Z NOV 07

FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT

TO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9726

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHMFIASS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RHCUAAA/CINCTRNS SCOTT AFB IL PRIORITY

RHMFIASS/COMUSCENTAF SHAW AFB SC PRIORITY

RHMFIASS/HQ AMC SCOTT AFB IL PRIORITY

RUEAHQA/HQ USAF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHFQAAA/HQ USAFE RAMSTEIN AB GE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001255

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STATE FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/20/2017

TAGS: PREL FAIR MARR MCAP MOPS TX US

SUBJECT: LOSS OF RESTRICTED BLANKET OVERFLIGHT AND LANDING
CLEARANCE FOR TURKMENISTAN

Classified By: CHARGE RICHARD E. HOAGLAND FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (U) This is an action request. See paragraph 11.

NO MORE BLANKET OVERFLIGHT

¶2. (C) The Government of Turkmenistan notified Embassy Ashgabat via diplomatic note on 20 November that it will not renew the blanket overflight and landing clearance number 999C that allows certain U.S. aircraft to use Turkmenistan airspace with little or no prior notification. Now, according to the diplomatic note, "permission for the use of Turkmenistan airspace and landing at the airport in Ashgabat by U.S. Department of Defense aircraft is possible in accordance with single-time requests, processed in the established order and submitted through diplomatic channels."

With this change, U.S. aircraft will now be required to follow local procedures established in August 2006 that govern all foreign aircraft entering Turkmenistan airspace.

¶3. (C) As outlined in a Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) diplomatic note of 3 August 2006 to all Diplomatic Missions, Consular Offices, and International Organizations accredited in Turkmenistan, requests for authorization to use Turkmen airspace or land at Turkmen airports should be submitted via diplomatic channels to MFA not later than:

a. Five days prior for aircraft with a head of state or a governmental delegation onboard intending to land in Turkmenistan and/or transit Turkmen airspace.

b. Five days prior for aircraft with a commercial or other delegation onboard intending to land in Turkmenistan.

c. Ten working days prior for state and other non-civil aviation aircraft and aircraft carrying hazardous or military materials.

d. In case of a flight plan change, MFA should be informed 72 hours in advance.

¶4. (C) Requests to overfly or land in Turkmenistan must be submitted on one of two forms that, for the most part, asks for standard information that DAO has included in requests for flight clearance for aircraft not covered by the blanket clearance (e.g., aircraft carrying a high-level delegation). However, the 3 August 2006 diplomatic note also asks for information regarding quantity and nature of cargo, noting that the presence of dangerous goods, arms, ammunition, photographic equipment, etc., onboard would require special permission from the Main Center of the United System of

Turkmenistan ATC. Up to now, for aircraft covered by the blanket clearance, DAO would inform MFA by diplomatic note and would only say which articles were not onboard (e.g., hazmat material, ammunition, etc.).

¶15. (C) The current overflight permission, established via an exchange of diplomatic notes, is due to expire on 30 November 2007. MFA last renewed the overflight permission on 10 November 2006 after only 11 days of consideration. The clearance number 999C has been in effect since 2003 and permits U.S. aircraft to transit Turkmen airspace to and from Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. There were over 1400 overflights in FY06 and over 1600 in FY07.

MFA CLARIFIES THE PROCESS

¶16. (C) In a meeting between the U.S. DATT and MFA Consular Section Chief on 20 November 2007 to discuss this change, the Consular Chief, who is responsible for such diplomatic clearances, confirmed that all aircraft overflight and landing requests must use the new forms that link aircraft type, mission, cargo, and transit times and locations.

Although the process is designed for a single permission for a single aircraft on a single day on a single route, MFA currently grants permissions for up to a month's worth of overflights and landings for several other countries involved in operations in Afghanistan, so long as the reportable information is identical for each flight.

¶17. (C) The MFA Consular Chief said that for most U.S. military aircraft the Embassy would have to submit the request 10 days ahead of time and MFA's response would come back after about three days. For medevacs, urgent flights, and aircraft that must change flight plans on short notice or while en route, the Embassy should submit a new diplomatic note for each and MFA would make a decision within 24 hours.

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Aircraft are allowed to transit Turkmenistan from the requested entry/exit times plus 96 hours, but there are no procedures in place to allow entry earlier than the time requested, except to submit a new dip note. He implied the type of cargo on each aircraft was not a big issue, so long as it was allowed for air transport according to the ICAO Technical Instructions for Safe Transport of Dangerous Cargo by Air manual.

U.S. OVERFLIGHTS -- A SUBJECT OF MUCH DISCUSSION

¶18. (C) The U.S. military presence in Turkmenistan, the overflights, and gas-and-go operation at Ashgabat Airport are regular topics of interest at the airport and within the military attach community. In discussions about MFA's decision, airport contacts openly questioned the "humanitarian" nature of the cargo over flying and/or refueling in Turkmenistan. They added, however, that by filling out the required forms, they would learn exactly what was in each cargo shipment. At a recent reception in response to another attach's question on U.S. air activity, the Russian defense attach noted that the number of U.S. overflights varies based on troop rotations.

IMPACT ON OPERATIONS

¶19. (C) The full impact of this Turkmenistan government decision on U.S. air operations is unknown, but is bound to complicate air mission planning and execution, especially given the volume of overflights. The USDAO and Government of Turkmenistan offices that deal with overflight and landing clearances also are not staffed or resourced to handle the projected increase in air clearance workload. The government already is slow in responding to individual aircraft clearances, and foreign aircraft without proper clearance are re-routed and prevented from entering Turkmenistan airspace. This change also affects SOS medevac flights. The Embassy was informed, at the same time, by separate diplomatic note, that the annual blanket clearance for medical flights would also be subject to the same requirement to ask for permission for overflight and landing for each flight.

THE WAY AHEAD

¶10. (C) MFA wants to be able to say it has approved and has full knowledge of what is transiting its territory. There appears to be some leeway, however, in how that information can be packaged and presented to MFA without requiring a

separate diplomatic note for each of the minimum of 1500 OEF-related flights that could cross Turkmenistan over the next 12 months. Even if the bulk of the overflights can be grouped by month, the number of exceptions to the rule may still make the process untenable. Regardless of the fact that meeting the required deadlines 100 percent of the time would be extremely difficult, the Turkmenistan government is not equipped to process them in a timely fashion. This is a government whose wheels normally grind exceedingly slowly. For medical flights, military or civilian, this new procedure is unworkable. DAO Ashgabat is already in contact with USAF air planners working out the details of December's airlift schedule.

¶11. (C) Action Request: If the Turkmenistan government is under pressure (from Russia?) to apply the 3 August 2006 overflight rules to U.S. flights, demanding that the Turkmen reinstate it probably will not work. While DOD may be able to come up with a workable solution for scheduled airlift, the number of short-notice changes to the scheduled flights will likely pose a problem, and we will no doubt need to decide how best to report/finesse the type of cargo, since this issue is the most sensitive one to the Turkmen. In addition, a waiver would still be needed for urgent civilian and military medevac flights. Embassy requests that Department send instructions for a formal response to the Turkmenistan government on this issue. We also ask that a similar demarche be made to the Turkmenistan Embassy in Washington.

HOAGLAND